United Nations S/2011/408

Security Council

Distr.: General
5 July 2011

Original: English

Letter dated 1 July 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that, under the presidency of Germany, the Security Council is scheduled to hold an open debate on the subject "Maintenance of international peace and security: the impact of climate change" on Wednesday, 20 July 2011. In order to help steer the discussions on the subject, Germany has prepared the attached concept note (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Peter **Wittig**
Permanent Representative
Germany

11-39864 (E) 120711

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 1 July 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Maintenance of international peace and security: the impact of climate change

Concept note

Introduction

1. Climate change is among the key challenges facing the international community. The impacts of climate change on peace and security are already tangible and will become increasingly evident in the years to come. This is occurring at a time of rapid global change marked by growing populations, increasing demand for natural resources and depletion of fertile soils and freshwater. These impacts could potentially drive social tensions, political unrest and violent conflict. The effects of climate change thus go beyond the mandate of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is the United Nations body for international climate negotiations.

2. The potential security implications of climate change were highlighted when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. Shortly thereafter, the General Assembly, in its resolution 63/281, invited the relevant organs of the United Nations, as appropriate and within their respective mandates, to intensify their efforts in considering and addressing climate change, including its possible security implications, and requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report to the Assembly on the possible security implications of climate change. Drawing upon the best available science at the time and the views of Member States and international organizations, the Secretary-General, in his 2009 report (A/64/350), clearly outlined the link between the risk multiplier effects of climate change and security, including with respect to armed conflict.

Security implications of climate change and the Security Council

3. The Security Council has increasingly acknowledged that sustainable peace requires a comprehensive approach to security. Only recently, it noted that in matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security under its consideration, conflict analysis and contextual information on, inter alia, social and economic issues were important, when such issues were drivers of conflict, and requested the Secretary-General to ensure that his reporting to the Council contained such contextual information (see S/PRST/2011/4).

4. Since climate change presents a particular challenge to fragile countries, it is important to take the security implications of climate change and its impact on resource availability into account in conflict analysis, mission planning and mission monitoring. The same applies to peacebuilding activities.

5. The Security Council first debated the link between energy, security and climate in April 2007 under the presidency of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (see S/PV.5663), and over 50 Member States have contributed inputs. Since that first debate, the international political and scientific discourse has

evolved significantly, and awareness of the potential security implications of climate change has increased. It is time to bring the security implications of climate change to the attention of the Council again. A debate on this topic is consistent with its mandate to maintain international peace and security and would provide an opportunity to advance the intense dialogue on the issue from its specific security perspective. The debate will focus exclusively on the potential security implications of climate change, recognizing the important role of other United Nations bodies in dealing with other aspects of climate change.

Security implications of climate change: sea-level rise

6. In his 2009 report, the Secretary-General identified sea-level rise as the "ultimate security threat" for some small island States, with some possibly set to "disappear over the next 30 years". While complete inundation may take years and the rise in the sea level may differ in different regions of the world, this is not only a future risk but a current reality: on some islands, the situation is already dire enough to require the evacuation of the resident population now. Furthermore, even before sea-level rise actually submerges an island, its impacts may render it uninhabitable, requiring permanent resettlement.

7. This raises profound questions regarding the very survival of several Member States. Receding coastlines could furthermore incite disputes over maritime territories and access to exclusive economic zones. This is not limited to small island developing States, but affects all island nations and countries with low-lying coastal areas as well, thus affecting the majority of Member States. These are threats that are so far unknown in the history of the United Nations. Current legal and political arrangements and the preparedness of the United Nations system to deal with these situations may prove insufficient, making climate-induced territorial changes a threat to international peace and security.

8. Millions of people will be affected on all continents. This is particularly worrisome with regard to post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts in a number of countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Timor-Leste.

9. Uncoordinated strategies aimed at coping with forced migration caused by sea-level rise may create social and political tensions, which may derail efforts in peacebuilding and post-conflict stabilization and become a threat to international peace and security, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/64/350).

10. The issue of sea-level rise raises, inter alia, the following questions:

(a) Is the United Nations system prepared to deal with the security risks resulting from sea-level rise? What are the different scenarios we will have to face? How could the Security Council address these scenarios within its mandate?

(b) What are the implications of climate-induced statelessness for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, as well as dispute settlement?

Security implications of climate change: the food security nexus

11. In 2005, the Security Council discussed the role of food security in its debate on Africa's food crisis as a threat to peace and security (see S/PV.5220). During the debate, it became clear that food insecurity could be both a cause and a consequence

of violent conflict and that food insecurity and intra-State conflict were closely linked.

12. Climate change is likely to reduce food production globally, with large parts of Africa and Asia suffering particular negative impacts. Although some countries in northern latitudes may theoretically benefit from climate change in the short term, the wildfires and crop failures in Australia and the Russian Federation in recent years have shown that developed and developing countries alike can be negatively affected.

13. Following the recent food crisis, social protests and unrest occurred in a number of countries and cities around the world (see A/64/350). Populations in countries in a post-conflict situation or suffering from instability can rarely afford escalating global food prices following droughts and similar events; this challenge and the fact that they have access to only a few substitutes makes them even more vulnerable to climate change impacts.

14. In addition, a number of fragile States are especially susceptible to increasing food prices owing to their dependence on food imports. In some countries on the Security Council's agenda, including Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia and the Sudan, nearly half or more of the labour force is employed in the agricultural sector. Major droughts, an increase in extreme weather events and a rising number of large-scale inundations causing a decrease in crop production may degrade the social-economic fabric of these and other countries and may be detrimental to peacebuilding.

15. Thus, food insecurity caused by climate change and related developmental impacts make countries more fragile and vulnerable to conflict risks, and may create a threat to international peace and security. It is necessary to consider these issues in all efforts related to conflict prevention, crisis management, peacebuilding and post-conflict stabilization.

16. Food insecurity caused by climate change raises, inter alia, the following questions:

- How could food insecurity caused by climate change be linked with or integrated in existing mechanisms for early warning and conflict prevention?
- What are the implications of the nexus between climate change and food security for United Nations peacekeeping missions and peacebuilding activities?

Further issues for discussion

17. Taking into account the arguments outlined above, a number of additional questions with respect to the security implications of climate change merit further reflection:

- In addition to sea-level rise and food insecurity, what threats to international peace and security posed by climate change need to be addressed (such as extreme weather events, impaired access to drinking water and climate-induced migration)?

- How could the Security Council and regional organizations working on peace and security best complement each other with regard to the security implications of climate change?
- What would be the appropriate mechanisms to periodically bring the security implications of climate change relevant to the work of the Security Council to its attention?
- How could the Security Council play a part in a more integrated approach to conflict prevention as foreseen in Security Council resolution 1625 (2005), in addition to placing greater emphasis on climate-related factors?
- How could other United Nations organs and agencies working on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, including the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Support Office, the Department for Political Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs, the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery of the United Nations Development Programme and the Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch of the United Nations Environment Programme, best integrate the security implications of climate change in their work?